DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 719 CS 006 739

TITLE Learning to Read through the Arts. Annual Evaluation Report. Summer 1981.
INSTITUTION New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn, N.Y. Div. of Special Education.; New York City Board of Education Brooklyn, N.Y. Office of Educational Evaluation.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aesthetic Education; Art Education; *Disabilities; Elementary Education; Program Descriptions; *Program Evaluation; *Reading Improvement; Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; Reading Skills; *Summer Programs; Validated Programs; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I; *Learning to Read through the Arts Program; National Diffusion Network Programs

ABSTRACT

The Learning to Read Through the Arts program of the New York City public school system was designed to provide supplementary reading services to 3,360 mildly to moderately handicapped children in grades three through nine for three summers. The program was held in 20 sites throughout the city and was scheduled for 4 hours a day. The program was organized around two major instructional components, individual and small group reading sessions and reading-oriented art workshops. At all sites, students attended two 90-minute art workshops per day and were offered a variety of visual, plastic, and performing art experiences. In addition, students were pulled out of the art workshops on a rotating basis for 45 minutes of daily, direct reading instruction. Results of a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the program indicated that the program was highly effective in meeting its proposed goals. Nearly all of the program participants mastered at least one new skill in reading and many mastered two or more. Despite some start-up difficulties and significant problems with transportation, attendance was excellent, and students were cooperative and eager to learn. Both reading and art teachers were enthusiastic about the program and cited gains made by students in self-confidence, socialization, and creative expression, as well as their measured improvement in reading skills. (HOD)

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ED219719

ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

E.S.E.A. TITLE I/P.S.E.N.

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OEE Evaluation Report

LEARNING TO
READ THROUGH
THE ARTS

SUMMER 1981

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CS006739

June 1982

A SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION OF THE SUMMER 1981 E.S.E.A. TITLE I/P.S.E.N. LEARNING TO READ THROUGH THE ARTS (L.T.R.T.A.) PROGRAM

The L.T.R.T.A. summer program was designed to provide supplementary reading services to 3,360 Title I-eligible, monolingual and bilingual handicapped children attending special education classes in community schools. Priority was given to those mildly- to moderately-impaired students who were not expected to pass the fourth- and seventh-grde promotional gates.

A diagnostic-prescriptive methodology was used, based on profiles from the Fountain Valley or the Leamos reading tests. Reading instruction was organized on the pull-out model with each teacher-paraprofessional team serving a total of 40 students. Direct reading sessions were integrated with the reading-oriented art workshops which constituted the major portion of the instructional day.

Results of the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the 1981 summer L.T.R.T.A. program indicated that the program was highly effective in meeting its proposed goals. Nearly all (91.9 percent) of the program participants mastered at least one new skill in reading and many (62.5 percent) mastered two or more. Despite some start-up difficulties and significant problems with transportation, attendance was excellent; students were cooperative and eager to learn. Both reading and art teachers were enthusiastic about the program and cited gains made by students in self-confidence, socialization, and creative expression, as well as their measured improvement in reading skills.

Relative to previous summer cycles, the 1981 program was seen to have made improvements in: integration of the reading and arts components; involvement by site supervisors; and adequate and timely provision of supplies. However, transportation continued to be problematic.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- --the estblishment of bus routes and the use of trial runs prior to the program;
- --the use of I.E.P.s both for facilitating the setting of objectives and also for giving summer teachers information about skills already learned which can be reinforced;
- --the selection of students for the bilingual component on the basis of records of their participation in bilingual programs through the school year.

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FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL READING SKILLS MASTERED BY STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED 60 PERCENT OF SCHEDULED SESSIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is an evaluation of the E.S.E.A. Title I Learning to Read Through the Arts (L.T.R.T.A.) program during its third summer of operation. L.T.R.T.A. provided supplementary reading services, incorporated into a reading oriented arts program, to 3,360 mildly- to moderately-handicapped children in grades three through nine, most of whom were not expected to pass the fourth and seventh grade promotional gates.

The efficacy of the L.T.R.T.A. program has been demonstrated in the two previous years; in the current program year the major premises and design remained the same. First, summer instruction has been shown to prevent the loss of skills which often occurs for handicapped students between spring and fall terms. Second, the program employed the arts as a core for learning; artistic activities, in a range of modalities, provided the basis for creative expression leading to experiences of success and improved confidence and motivation. Reading, writing, and listening skills were exercised in the context of non-threatening, divergent tasks and, at the same time, the artistic experiences were incorporated into direct reading instruction.

The program was held in 20 sites throughout the city from July 6 to August 7, 1981 and was scheduled for four hours a day, Monday through Friday. It was administered by the Division of Special Education of the New York City Public Schools and directed by a coordinator and two assistants. Site supervisors, teacher trainers, artist teachers, reading teachers, paraprofessionals, student aides, and clerical and security staff were present at every site.

The evaluation of the L.T.R.T.A. program was based on both quantitative data on pupil achievement and qualitative data on program implementation. The results of pre- and posttest administration of the Fountain Valley Reading Test or the Leamos Reading Test for Hispanic students with limited English proficiency were recorded on O.E.E.-developed data retrieval forms. In addition, field consultants visited all of the sites twice and completed observation and interview records designed for evaluation of the L.T.R.T.A. program.

II. EVALUATION OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The L.T.R.T.A. summer program was designed to provide supplementary reading services to 3,360 Title I-eligible, monolingual and bilingual handicapped children attending special education classes in community schools. Prioity was given to those mildly- to moderately-impaired students who were not expected to pass the fourth- and seventh-grade promotional gates.

A diagnostic-prescriptive methodology was used based on profiles from the Fountain Valley or the Leamos reading tests. Reading instruction was organized on the pull-out model with each teacher-paraprofessional team serving a total of 40 students. Direct reading sessions were integrated with the reading-oriented arts workshops which constituted the major portion of the instructional day.

FINDINGS

Instructional Activities, Planning, and Assessment

The program was organized around two major instructional components, individual and small-group reading sessions and reading-oriented art workshops. At all sites, students attended two 90-minute art workshops per day and were offered a variety of visual, plastic, and performing art experiences. Observed activities included ceramics, photography, music, drama, puppetry, and painting. In addition, students were pulled out of the art workshops on a rotating basis for 45 minutes of daily, direct

reading instruction.

Class sizes were generally small with an average attendance of five students. Both the reading and art teachers used a range of instructional approaches appropriate to the content of the lesson, with the reading sessions individually structured somewhat more often. In about one-half of the reading sessions and nearly all of the art workshops the teacher was assisted by a paraprofessional, student teacher, or student aide.

Reading goals were incorporated into the arts component in a number of ways: students read and followed directions, learned new vocabulary, and wrote and performed scripts. In addition, all students kept daily journals of their work. In most classrooms, master journals were also in evidence.

Most of the reading teachers based their reading lessons on the students' arts experiences. This was not always possible as students often came from several different art workshops if they had been grouped for reading on the basis of their reading levels. However, when students from the same art workshop were pulled out for reading together, some teachers stated that they found it difficult to plan for the range of reading abilities represented.

Students' folders were generally maintained by the reading teachers and contained up-to-date test results, individualized reading objectives, and samples of student work. In many cases folders also included individualized educational plans (I.E.P.s) and suggestions for the regular school year classroom teachers. Weekly lesson plans for both art and reading sessions were usually kept by the teacher-trainers. Most teachers

found the Fountain Valley Reading Test suitable for their students and used it for individualized planning. However, some teachers found it inappropriate for certain students or for a summer program. Many suggested the I.E.P.s would be a more productive basis for individualized planning.

Physical Setting, Equipment, and Supplies

The classrooms for both reading and art were generally appropriate and well-organized. Student work, both artistic and written, instructional objectives, and project-related materials were displayed, and supplies were readily available.

All of the art workshops and most of the reading classes were adequately supplied with materials and equipment. In a few reading classes, supplies were insufficient or delayed.

Orientation, Supervision, and Staff Communication

Most of the teachers expressed a need for modification of pre-service training. They reported that there were too many people involved or that it was appropriate only for the less experienced teachers. Many felt there was not enough emphasis on demonstration of technique and several art teachers complained of being trained for one workshop and assigned to another.

On-site supervision, in contrast, was quite favorably regarded. Supervisors and teacher trainers were seen as competent and experienced and teachers frequently remarked that they felt free to bring up any program issues with them.

Many of those interviewed indicated a need for more communication between reading and arts teachers. They felt that one hour per week

was insufficient for effective coordination of the two program elements.

Administration

Delays in planning contributed to a number of problems for the program. Teachers were assigned only shortly before the program began, giving them little time for preparation. Student registration, on the other hand, was generally completed well in advance. However, there was no follow-up and parents were not notified of the exact schedule and site for some time. Many families made other plans which necessitated last-minute recruiting of other students.

Planning problems were particularly evident in the bilingual component of the program. As originally proposed, one Spanish-speaking reading teacher was to be assigned to each site. However, in Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island, there were no bilingual teachers and in the remaining two boroughs, some bilingual reading teachers were assigned several to a site and others taught in the art workshops. Pupil assignment was also a problem, with students being selected for the bilingual component on the basis of their having Spanish surnames. Another difficulty was the late arrival of the Leamos testing materials, in some cases up to two weeks into the program. Most teachers reported that they had already tested their students with the Fountain Valley and were reluctant to administer another test so late into the program. As a result, Leamos was only used with the roughly 30 students who spoke Spanish exclusively.

As with previous program cycles, difficulties with busing constituted a pervasive problem. Frequent, unannounced scheduling changes and num-

erous instances of failing to pick up children were reported, both of which apparently contributed to student attrition.

Program Impact

The majority of teachers in the L.T.R.T.A. program were enthusiastic about the overall design and impact and saw the program as highly effective. Individualized attention, the non-threatening atmosphere of the art workshops, and the integration of the reading and art components were all cited as contributing to program success. In particular, teachers reported that at first children were often reluctant to leave the art workshops for reading instruction but later were eager to spend time reading. Many teachers attributed this to the "success experiences" in the art workshops which they saw as encouraging the students to attempt more difficult tasks.

Increased positive socialization was also cited as a result of the art workshops with many teachers remarking that students helped and praised each other much more than usual. In addition, teachers noted a high level of motivation, greater confidence, and relative absence of behavior problems.

III. QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION

Data were reported for a total of 2,459 students, served at 20 sites throughout the city. Of these, 218 (8.9 percent) were sporadic or low attenders, 100 (4.1 percent) were discharged early, and 59 (2.4 percent) were late admissions. Complete achievement data were reported for 2,073 (84.6 percent).

Most of the students (1,986 or 80.8 percent) were in elementary schools; 303 (12.3 percent) were in intermediate schools; and 86 (3.5 percent) were in secondary schools. For an additional 84 (3.4 percent), level was not reported. The average age was 10.6 years and the mode was 10 years.

The program included students from a variety of disability groups, with the largest number (1,031 or 41.9 percent) classified as neurologically impaired and served in Health Conservation 30 classes. Other principal disability groups were educable mentally retarded (381 or 15.5 percent); emotionally handicapped (349 or 14.2 percent); neurologically impaired and emotionally handicapped (277 or 11.3 percent); and specific learning disabled (112 or 4.6 percent).

ATTENDANCE

The majority of students (1,355 or 55 percent) attended from 20 to 25 sessions; a total of 25 sessions were offered. The mean was 20.1 and the mode was 25. Overall average percent attendance was 77.4; for students with complete data, average percent attendance was 84.5.

PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT IN READING

Mastery of reading skills by program students was measured by the Fountain Valley, an individually-administered criterion-referenced reading test. The objective proposed that by August 7, 1981, 75 percent of the students who attended at least 60 percent of the sessions would have mastered one reading objective.

An inspection of Table 1, which presents the frequency distribution of total reading skills mastered by all students for whom complete data were available, shows that 91.9 percent mastered at least one new objective. The mean number of skills was 2.03 and the mode was two. A second frequency distribution was prepared for those students who attended at least 60 percent, or 15 out of 25, of the scheduled sessions. These data, which are presented in Table 2, showed that 92.2 percent of the students mastered at least one new skill; the average number was 2.05 and the mode was two. Thus, the objective of one new skill was met, with and without the qualification of 60-percent attendance. These results represent an improvement over the previous year's results during which 84 percent of participating students met the objective.

The vast majority of skills learned were in comprehension, with 81.1 percent of all students for whom complete data were reported mastering at least one comprehension objective. A small number of students (17.5 percent) mastered vocabulary objectives and a very few (2.4 percent) learned phonics skills.

Students generally mastered most of the skills they attempted; in most cases, two skills were learned out of the two or three that were assessed, for an average percent mastery of 70.9.

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF
TOTAL READING SKILLS MASTERED
BY ALL PARTICIPATING STUDENTS
(N = 2,073)

Number of Skills Mastered	Number of Students	Relative Percent of Population	Cumulative Percent of Population
8	10	0.5	0.5
7	8	0.4	0.4
6	17	0.8	1.7
5	61	2.9	4.6
4	142	6.8	11.4
3	372	17.9	29.3
2	688	33.2	62.5
1	609	29.4	91.9
0	166	8.0	99.9[a]

[a] Does not sum to 100 percent due to rounding error.

* Almost 92 percent of the participating students mastered at least one new reading skill and 62.5 percent mastered two or more.

TABLE 2

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL READING SKILLS MASTERED BY STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED 60 PERCENT OF SCHEDULED SESSIONS (N = 1,940)

Number of Skills Mastered	Number of Students	Relative Percent of Population	Cumulative Percent of Population
8	10	0.5	0.5
7	8	0.4	0.9
6	16	0.8	1.7
5	59	3.0	4.7
4	132	6.8	11.5
3	353	18.2	29.7
2	648	33.4	63.1
1	563	29.0	92.2
0	151	7.8	100.0

* More than 92 percent of the students who attended at least 15 of the 25 scheduled sessions mastered at least one new reading skill and over 63 percent mastered two or more.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the 1981 summer L.T.R.T.A. program indicated that the program was highly effective in meeting its proposed goals. Nearly all (91.9 percent) of the program participants mastered at least one new skill in reading and many (62.5 percent) mastered two or more. Despite some start-up difficulties and significant problems with transportation, attendance was excellent; students were cooperative and eager to learn. Both reading and art teachers were enthusiastic about the program and cited gains made by students in self-confidence, socialization, and creative expression, as well as their measured improvement in reading skills.

During the 1981 cycle, the program was seen to have made improvements in a number of areas that were cited as problems in previous years. These and also the difficulties which remained were largely administrative in nature. The following were among the areas in which significant improvement took place:

-- integration of the reading and arts components;

-- involvement by site supervisors; and

-- adequate and timely provision of supplies.

However, there were several problems which apparently interfered with optimal implementation. Chief among these was transportation. There were widespread complaints about scheduling and pick-up of students. Other problems cited by many of the respondents were the delays in hiring and assignment of teachers. The bilingual component, as a whole, seemed to suffer from administrative difficulties which were manifested in the

following ways: seemingly erratic staff assignment; delays in distribution of testing materials; and, perhaps most problematic, selection of participating students on the basis of their having Spanish surnames as opposed to their language proficiency.

Based on the findings which have been presented, the following recommendations are offered:

-- transportation is a critical problem which could perhaps be alleviated by the establishment of bus routes and the use of trial runs prior to the program;

-- the program should give consideration to the use of I.E.P.s both for facilitating the setting of objectives and also for giving summer teachers information about skills already learned which can be reinforced;

-- if the program is to include a bilingual component attention should be given to more effective selection and assignment of participating staff and students, specifically, students could be selected on the basis of records of their participation in bilingual programs through the school year.

In conclusion, it must be reiterated that the L.T.R.T.A. program was highly successful in promoting the cognitive and affective development of handicapped children and it should be continued and expanded to include all handicapped children whom it can benefit. The few weaknesses that exist appear to be amenable to solution.